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ABSTRACT

The problem of truancy and irregular school attendance is widespread in urban, suburban, and rural school districts. The media have interesting and far-reaching capabilities for combating this problem. Possible uses of the print media in this area include posters, bumper stickers, billboards, leaflets and flyers, handouts, buttons, T-shirts, newspapers, and so forth. The electronic media, including radio, television, tapes and records, could be employed in the form of talk shows, interviews, spot announcements, news, and public service announcements. The most effective and productive use of the media to promote school attendance would entail: (1) targeting the population: (2) deciding on the message: (3) deciding on the specific means or vehicle: (4) arranging for production: (5) placing, displaying, or distributing the product: and (6) utilizing the evaluation data to improve the entire message. (Author/RLV)

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The Media Is the Message: Using the Media To Improve School Attendance

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The Media is the Message: Using the Media
To Improve School Attendance

The problems of truancy and irregular school attendance are widespread in many school districts throughout the country. Not only are the problems prevalent in urban school districts, but suburban and rural ones as well. Throughout the country concerned school administrators, teachers, legislators, community leaders, parents and other interested citizens are seeking effective ways to curb truancy and improve school attendance. There are myriad reasons for this quest. One reason is that in some school districts funding allocations are based on the average daily attendance of pupils. Another reason is that teachers are beginning to see a direct correlation between the number of pupils enrolled in school (Indeed the regular attendance of these pupils) and the number of teachers employed. Another reason is that some view the problems of truancy and irregular school attendance as highly political in nature. Still another reason is genuine concern for the welfare and well being of pupils. Lastly, another reason is that some perceive the problems as indices to the effectiveness of the job performance of certain professionals charged to work with youth.

Upon surveying persons and factors that combine in having a stake in these problems, one realizes that there is a broad base to target, tap and mobilize for collective

action in addressing the problems of truancy and irregular school attendance. There are numerous approaches to working on these problems. Let us turn our attention to one approach- the media.

The media has interesting and far reaching implications and possibilities. Both the print and electronic media have been used directly and tangentially in matters related to curbing truancy and reducing poor school attenance; for many years and in numerous ways. Proposing then to use the media to improve school attendance is not new, nor innovative. However, it does help us to sharpen our focus, draw on our skills and zero in on improving our techniques.

Drawing on past examples and projecting future usages, let us examine some ways that the media can be used in combatting truancy and improving school attendance.

The Print Media

The print media has distinct possibilities for use in this area. Some examples are:

1. Posters - Pupil made
2. Posters - Professionally made
3. Bumper Stickers
4. Billboards
5. Leaflets and flyers
6. Handouts
7. Buttons

8. T shirts
9. Newspapers
10. Newsletters
11. Occasional reports and papers
12. Magazines
13. Bulletin Boards

Pause for a moment if you will and imagine the boundless potentials which the above could offer in the area of school attendance. They are all means. The message in all cases, would be catchy, informative, succinct and/or descriptive. All, of course, would relate to combatting truancy and improving school attendance.

The Electronic Media

Just as the print media has distinct possibilities for use, so has the electronic media. Some examples are:

1. Radio
    a. programs
    b. talk shows
    c. news
    d. interviews
    e. spot announcements
2. Television
    a. programs
    b. talk shows
    c. news
    d. interviews
    e. spot announcements
    f. public service announcements

3. Tapes

   a. cassettes
   b. video

4. Records

Again pause, if you will and allow the potentials, which the electronic media offers to stir your imagination.

Knowing that there are all of these avenues at our disposal to send out our own select and special messages on truancy and poor school attendance, it becomes incumbent to plan the most effecitve and productive use of the media to improve school attendance in specific jurisdictions. Hence, it is imperative to know the jurisdiction--its population, tradition, values and level of commitment to combatting truancy and improving school attendance. Once having mastered this very basic information, one can then advance a media project and proceed to:

1. Target the population.

To whom will your media campaign be directed. Will it be elementary pupils? Secondary pupils" Parents" School personnel: Attendance officers? Police? Court personnel? All of the above? Or still another segment?

2. Decide on the message.

Make it short, concise, crisp and to the point.

3. Decide on the specific means or vehicle.

Will it be a button or a public service announcement? Both" One or some of the many other means which can be chosen?

4. Arrange for production.

Seek professional help if needed. Contact all who are needed to make the project "go"--artists, vendors, publishers, editors, speakers and the like. Handle, what your own available resources allow you. In other words do what you can, before seeking help. It simplifies matters.

5. Place, display and/or distribute the product, strategically.

Try to schedule electronic media at a time when it will reach a maximum number of the target population. Place print media where the largest number of target population can view it.

6. Evaluate and get feedback on the results of the product in a systematic and meaningful manner.

Take a poll, do research, spot check to see how your message is being received and responded to by the target population.

7. Inculcate the evaluation and feedback data to improve on the entire message or any aspect of it to improve the overall effect.

Keep an on-going media program cycle in operation. While a one shot deal or a single blitz might be fun, it is probably more productive to have a cyclical media project in effect on a continuing basis.

Once, having considered the possibilities of the "means," what is the "message"? Possibilities are endless. It cannot be overemphasized that both the means and the message must reflect local and individual resources and needs. Here are a few brain teasers that you might envision as having possibilities for adaptability.

See if you can put a picture with each of the following. You also might want to reflect on the means through which the message can be transmitted:

1. School is Important
2. Don't Cut Yourself Out of the Picture
3. Were You in School Today?
4. Hooking School is Dumb!
5. Go to School, You Might Learn Something There
6. I Wish I Had Gone to School
7. School Can Be Fun
8. Come To School
9. It is 9:00 (a.m.). Is Your Child In School?
10. School is Where It's At
11. Is It Too Late For Me?
12. Better Late Than Not At All
13. Hooking School is Against The Law
14. Don't Play Hookey: There are More Fun Things to Play
15. Don't Hook and Be A Crook
16. Where Do I Go From Here?
17. Going to School Is Your Job

Good strong school attendance laws, policies, procedures, and implementation and enforcement mechanisms are paramount for successful usage of the media in curbing truancy and combatting irregular school attendance. There is much more involved in a media campaign or enterprise than merely "getting pupils in school." Effective use of the media is but one method, one technique which should be complemented by many others which are not necessarily within the scope of this particular presentation.

These, then are some suggestions for using the media to improve school attendance. We have seen the phenomenal results of Madison Avenue advertising techniques sell all kinds of products, ideas and even people. It seems that within the Madison Avenue success story, there is a lesson for those interested in using the media to improve school attendance.

During the 1960's the educational community experienced a resurgence or a concentrated emphasis on the media in terms of both hardware and software. Programs for training personnel, creating media centers and establishing degree programs in media were the order of the day. Cursorily, it seems that the primary beneficiary of that era was the instructional side of school. Specifically curriculum, staff development in curriculum areas, supplementary reading materials and similar such efforts. By and large school

support services (including pupil personnel and school attendance) have yet to derive sufficient benefit or explore full use of the media in their work and for the population, whom they service.

This is not to negate the fact that some school districts, organizations, and other groups have made limited use of the media in certain instances. Some have even made maximum use in certain instances. Few have made maximum use in most instances. Again, the full potential of both the print and electronic media has not been fully exploited in improving school attendance.

We might consider then a series of experimental media projects that could be launched by school districts, jurisdictions or a specific segment of the community toward this end.

You might want to:

1. Print the names of truants in a circulation (Newspaper, newsletter, handouts, etc.).
2. Print the names of perfect school attenders in a circulation (newspaper, newsletter, handouts, etc.).
3. Announce the name of truants on the airwaves.
4. Announce the names of perfect, good or improved school attenders on the airwaves.
5. Work with a local media station to receive promotional tickets for distribution among

youngsters with perfect, good or improved school attendance. Media coverage is inherent in this kind of relationship.

6. Inform all levels of the community (or jurisdiction) of the existing compulsory school attendance law and its provisions. Simplify it, pull out excerpts, make portions of it in a comic-book-like format for simplicity.

7. Publicize cooperative efforts in a jurisdiction to improve school attendance. If there are none in your area, initiate one or some.

8. Hold brainstorming sessions to determine the best kind of media campaign for the jurisdiction.

These are only a few of the vast possibilities for media use. All are not suitable in every school district, jurisdiction or community. Your creativity enters when you select the projects and ideas that have the most potential for your particular situation.

The Media is the message. The message is come to school, regardless of how it is packaged.